

Sand Creek Massacre Historic Site set aside

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WASHINGTON — Since a bloody massacre by government troops 240 years ago claimed the lives of 150 Cheyenne and Arapahoe American Indians in Colorado, some tribe members say they have been unable to truly heal.

President Bush signed a bill Tuesday that not only will give the Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribes a chance to begin finding peace, but also ultimately will open the Sand Creek Massacre Historic Site in Kiowa County so the public can learn about what happened there.

The bill, introduced by Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., and Rep. Marilyn Mus-

grave, R-Colo., added enough privately owned acreage to the site to permit the National Park Service and the tribes to develop the land for public visitation.

"This legislation will benefit all of Colorado, mark our history and protect a site that is not only historic but also sacred to the descendants of the individuals killed there," Allard said.

Musgrave said the new law affirms the government's relationship with the Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribes.

"This massacre marks a dramatic point in their history and a poignant moment in the American frontier," she said, adding the site "will honor the innocent lives lost and preserve this solemn place."

The site will allow visitors to stand

where 700 Colorado volunteers attacked the Southern Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians — most of them children and older men and women — camped along Sand Creek in 1864. James Doyle of the Park Service said it would give the public a sense of "the suffering that went on there."

"It's a shameful chapter in American history," Doyle said. "If as Americans we're to grow and learn from mistakes, it's important to acknowledge the mistakes that happened."

For American Indians, it means more than a chance to teach the public; it is an opportunity for spiritual healing among the surviving generations, said Gail Ridgely, Northern Arapahoe Tribe representative to the Sand Creek Project,

whose ancestors died in the massacre.

"It's a powerful tool to teach our people to memorialize and honor our ancestors," he said, adding that even today American Indians will come from Oklahoma and Montana to pray there. "Because of them, we're here today and strong."

Doyle said he isn't sure when the site will open, but the Park Service needs about \$1.3 million from the federal government for a visitor center and other facilities to accommodate an expected 30,000 yearly visits. The tribes will be able to continue to use the land for religious ceremonies, he said.

"Once people get here, we want them to see the rest of the county as well," said Janet Frederick, executive



director of the Kiowa County Economic Development Foundation. The county will seek federal funds to help pave the country roads leading to the site she said.